



To: Mayor Lee Leffingwell  
Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole  
Council Member Chris Riley  
Council Member Mike Martinez  
Council Member Kathie Tovo  
Council Member Laura Morrison  
Council Member Bill Spelman

Cc: Land Development Code Advisory Group members

From: Bill Evans, President  
Paul Hilgers, Chief Executive Officer  
Emily Chenevert, Director of Public Affairs

RE: ABoR recommendation of Code Approach #3 (Complete Makeover)

Not since 1984 has Austin had an opportunity to take a searching look at its land development code and how the code aids or hinders our community's adopted vision of a vibrant future. CodeNEXT offers a watershed chance to be bold and thoroughly revise Austin's LDC to bring it into better alignment with adopted community values and planning best practices that have been implemented in similar cities. As such, the Austin Board of REALTORS® urges you to seize this rare opportunity and adopt a code approach that steers toward inclusive and comprehensive change.

When Opticos diagnosed Austin's land development code, they found salient flaws: the code is not in line with adopted community values, it limits household affordability and choice, and it is unnecessarily complicated and cumbersome. The strong conclusions in the diagnosis confirmed what many in the community have believed for years; that Austin's code does not provide an effective toolset to manage the City's rapid growth.

According to the City of Austin demographer, Austin is projected to grow by an additional 100,000 people by 2020. The population of Travis County and the Austin metro area is expected to swell by an even greater number. This growing population will require an



abundance of housing choices that are well situated with respect to transit, retail, and employment centers. Providing these choices will require taking a careful look at land development in the urban core, which already has access to employment and activity centers; as well as outlying areas, to incentivize development with good access to transit and other services.

As the demographer's data affirm, the question is not whether Austin will continue to grow, but how. Will Austin continue down the road to greater congestion and housing scarcity, or will it take a sharp, corrective turn toward more walkable, livable, and transit-oriented development? The outcome depends in part on the courage of City leaders to make the difficult decisions needed to incentivize infill and new development along the goals specified in Imagine Austin.

Opticos has made a strong case that Austin has a very significant gap in its housing landscape that they term the "missing middle." Missing middle housing options, which range from duplexes and multiplexes to townhouses and small courtyard apartments, help provide a healthy menu of housing choices that are compatible with nearby single-family dwellings and support vibrant corridors and activity centers.

The middle-of-the-road code approach recommended by Opticos would be too passive in creating form-based code options for certain urban core neighborhoods through an opt-in process. Opt-in processes are susceptible to being slow, resource-intensive, and dominated by a few vocal activists who do not necessarily represent the community at large. Austin has gone through opt-in processes for infill options in neighborhood plans, and these processes have contributed to the confusing and checkered nature of our land development code that Opticos identified as a major flaw in their diagnosis.

It is hard to see how a narrowly scoped opt-in process will make a meaningful change in the range of low-to-medium density housing choices available to Austinites. In order to begin filling in the missing middle in Austin, these options need to be made available on a broad scale and in a timely manner.

Austin will either meet the challenge of housing 100,000 new Austinites by 2020 by embracing creative ways to increase the supply of housing – as well as housing choices – in urban core neighborhoods and around activity centers in outlying neighborhoods, or it will continue further down its historic path of ignoring growth and treating symptoms. This depends largely on whether our leaders now are willing to be bold and demand a complete makeover. ABoR urges you to rise to this challenge by approving Code Approach 3: Complete Makeover.